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Testimony to Illinois' Healthcare Reform Implementation Council Hearing October 6th, 2010

Presented by the *Illinois Works for the Future* Campaign

Illinois Works for the Future is a campaign led by the Chicago Jobs Council and endorsed by over 120 organizations and individuals who believe to compete successfully in a global economy and end poverty, Illinois needs integrated economic and workforce development policies that works for everyone: producing skilled workers, in strong businesses, with good jobs, that foster thriving communities.

On behalf of the Campaign, and our partners and supporters from across the state, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments today. We appreciate the focus of today's hearing as the Council considers the role a prepared workforce plays in insuring high quality healthcare for all Illinois citizens as the Affordable Care Act is implemented.

Healthcare has long been identified as a high growth industry for our state. There are many established initiatives working at the state, regional and local levels to develop a pipeline of qualified individuals for healthcare occupations, providing a rich base of knowledge and resources to build from. The State has spearheaded sector-based strategies for workforce development in healthcare, and other regional initiatives and local training programs exist in many parts of the state, funded with a mix of state, federal and private dollars and administered by institutions such as non-profit organizations, vocational schools and community colleges.

The success of these initiatives relies on partnerships between the workforce development institutions and representatives from the health care industry. Effective partnerships ensure program graduates are equipped with the skills employers demand and able to successfully obtain employment. In addition to providing job opportunities, industry representatives can provide occupational and job requirement data, review training materials, provide workplace experience, and play other roles that ensure high-quality, relevant training.

The provision of quality healthcare in a comprehensive delivery system demands qualified workers for a range of occupations, including entry level and middle skill positions. Training and education for healthcare should be designed along career "pathways" where each level along the path is aligned with and leads to the requirements of education and employment at the next level and beyond. These career pathways provide roadmaps to educational and career advancement, and can lead to greater retention of individuals in a sector.

To ensure low-income individuals are able to pursue healthcare occupations, these pathways must start with bridge educational strategies that integrate basic skills education, provide training and education models that allow students to earn wages as they gain skills and credentials, and offer a range of support services to students and workers to increase their chances of success along the path. Bridge educational strategies and career pathways are of critical importance for the future

of any Illinois industry since nearly two million working age adults in Illinois (ages 25 to 54) have either no high school degree or only a high school degree.

Illinois is already a leader in developing bridge programs and building educational pathways. The career pathway/bridge model is particularly effective in improving the employment potential of low-skill adults, and has proven effective in the healthcare sector. I would like to take a minute to describe a program that has achieved success and demonstrates some of the elements upon which a quality program depends. The *Carreras en Salud* program is a model program for the integration of bridge educational strategies. This example also demonstrates the role a strong community based organization can play in bridge pathway programs.

Carreras en Salud: A Chicago Bilingual Healthcare Bridge Partnership was created with the purpose of building a customized career pathway in nursing occupations in order to assist employers to meet their demands for a bilingual workforce that satisfies the needs of the region's burgeoning Hispanic population.

To move Latinos out of, what are for them, a dead-end job, "Carreras En Salud" begins its work at the Certified Nurse Assistant skill level. The pathway progresses to a Pre-Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program, to an LPN program, and then on to Registered Nurse. Carreras en Salud offers students seven levels at which they can enroll. Students enter and advance according to their capacity and test scores and each level is designed to be completed in 16 weeks

This partnership between Instituto Del Progreso, Association House of Chicago, Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center (HPVEC) of Wilbur Wright College and the National Council of La Raza is a demonstration of the impact that community-based organizations, local colleges, policy advocates, and expert researches can have on local initiatives. Partners play the following roles: Instituto administers the three lower levels of the career pathway and is responsible for job placement and other support. Association House provides intensive case management during the pre-LPN classes, and HPVEC administers the pre-LPN levels and transitions students to the LPN level at Wright College.

According to Carreras faculty, the success of their program is based on these essential elements:

- Effective Partnerships
- Clearly Defined Pathway (Academic, Career and Social Ladders)
- Pre-College Contextualized Curriculums
- Strong and Constant Academic and
- Non-Academic Support Services

This program has received numerous national and state awards of excellence from places such as the National Council for Continuing Education and Training, the Illinois Council of Continuing and Higher Education, the National Council of La Raza/ Casey Foundation, the US Department of Education and the US Department of Labor. As of Summer 2009¹ Carreras en Salud has served 1,197 students, as achieved a cumulative completion rate of 94%, a licensing/certification rate of 95% for LPN and CAN graduates, and a placement rate of 100% for 343 LPN's and CNA's. Much can be learned from their success.

¹ "How to Build Bridge Programs that Fit into a Career Pathway: A Step-by-Step Guide Based on the Carreras en Salud Program in Chicago". Estrada. Chicago. 2010
http://www.iccb.state.il.us/pdf/shifting%20gears/Instituto2010_HowToBuildBridgePrograms.pdf

We would like to provide the Council with the following recommendations to consider as your work moves forward.

➤ **Fund and support strategies that create on-ramps to healthcare careers for lower-skilled adults.**

- Utilize the bridge program model of the State’s Shifting Gears Initiative and promote career pathways to increase credential and degree attainment of low income individuals and those with educational barriers to employment, in order to enter and advance in healthcare careers
- Support innovative “earn and learn” strategies so students can earn wages or stipends as they are enrolled in training and education programs, to reduce the risk of non-completion for economic reasons. These strategies serve as needed complements to scholarships and loan forgiveness programs that may not be feasible for those with no other sources of income.
- Allocate sufficient funding to community based organizations and training institutions to provide a full range of support services (child care, transportation, and mentoring are examples) that individuals may need to stay in training and education, transition to paid employment, and navigate steps along a career pathway.

➤ **Build from systems and resources already in place.**

Any recommendations of this group should be sure to build off of existing knowledge about what works, as well as the successful delivery systems and partnerships already in place. A few examples of the many healthcare workforce development efforts in Illinois include:

- The Healthcare Workforce Institute at the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council works with hospitals and educational, government, workforce investment and community partners to address the workforce needs of the healthcare industry in the region.
- The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) has committed resources to advancing sectoral strategies in high growth industries, one of which is healthcare. High growth/high demand occupations are also priority areas for training throughout the Workforce Investment Act system.
- The Shifting Gears Initiative in Illinois, led by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and DCEO, promotes the development of bridge programs, and is working towards system and policy changes to facilitate program implementation.
- The Central Illinois Regional Collaborative Effort (CIRCLE) is a collaboration of economic development organizations from Bloomington-Normal, Decatur, Jacksonville, Springfield, Peoria and surrounding areas, whose initial efforts have focused on healthcare workforce development.
- The Pathways to Successful Healthcare Careers program, a partnership between community partners, local hospitals, and the Central Illinois Workforce Board, is assisting low-wage, incumbent healthcare workers progress along career pathways.
- There is a Community-Based Healthcare grant through US Department of Labor which is providing scholarships to individuals who would like to pursue a healthcare career in Peoria and Bloomington. There are 5 healthcare training programs available through Illinois Central College include Medical Assistants, Radiographers, Surgical Technicians, LPN to RN Bridge or RN Nursing. The Radiography training program is also available at Heartland Community College.
- Governor’s State University recently launched the “Health Care Jobs for Chicago Southland” program with a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to train and place unemployed and low-wage individuals in a range of healthcare occupations and to delineate career pathways in the industry.

- Local Workforce Investment Boards in the metropolitan Chicago area and in northern Illinois have formed collaborations in pursuit of Federal funding for bridge programming in the healthcare sectors.
- **Support sectoral strategies and programs that require partnerships with the healthcare industry.**
- Two successful State job training programs, the Job Training and Economic Development program and the Employer Training Investment program, are based on employer needs, and can incorporate a sector based approach. These programs can be a resource for training in healthcare occupations.
 - Leverage Federal policies that can support planning and implementation of sectoral and regional strategies.
- **Focus efforts on high demand occupations at all skills levels.**
- Include a full range of occupations and skill levels to advance strategies for a robust workforce development system that can deliver not only primary care physicians and nurses, but also the occupations that are entry points to those occupations and the many other support staff that comprise our current health care system. The following are examples of middle skills occupations with significant growth rates projected through 2018² in Illinois: Physician Assistants (32%); Dental Hygienists (30%); Pharmacy Technicians (24%); Medical Assistants (28%); and Medical Records & Health Info Technicians (17 %).
- **Use the State's 21st Century Workforce Development Fund to support workforce strategies.**
- The 21st Century Workforce Development Fund, passed into law last year, is designed to draw and funnel flexible funds to meet local needs, build capacity and serve priority populations. Implementing this Fund would enable expansion of current effective strategies to meet healthcare workforce needs.

The *Illinois Works for the Future* campaign thanks you for your attention to this matter. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you further on these issues and can be reached at 312-252-0460 ext. 301.

² Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information & Analysis Division, <http://lmi.ides.state.il.us/projections/statefiles/IL0818LTOcc.pdf>, obtained 10/4/10.